

Fort Snelling
Quarters Buildings 240-249, 253
Fort Snelling Historic District
(St. Paul) Minneapolis Vic
Hennepin County
Minnesota

HABS No. MN-56-Y

HABS
MINN.
27-FOSNEL,
2-Y-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

QUARTERS BUILDINGS

8LDGS. NO. 240, 241, 242, 243, 244, 245, 246, 247, 248, 249 and 253
Fort Snelling Historic District, St. Paul, Hennepin County, Minnesota

Location: Minnehaha Avenue
Fort Snelling
St. Paul, MN 55111

Present Owner: Veterans Administration
54th and 48th Avenue So.
Minneapolis, MN 55417

Present Occupant: Vacant

Present Use: Vacant

Statement of Significance: The Quarters buildings are historically significant to the development of the Fort Snelling military reservation prior to World War I. In this context the buildings have been included on the National Registry of Historical Places. The buildings are sited on land adjacent to the Fort Snelling National Historical Landmark. The architectural design of these buildings reflects a common military standard. Their location and utilization during a period of development of the original military reservation is historically significant.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Physical History:

Date of Erection: There is no historical record indicating the date of construction of some of the buildings. However, U.S. Army Quartermaster records reveal that the buildings were either purchased and moved or constructed on site as follows:

<u>8ldg. No.</u>	<u>Moved on Site</u>	<u>Built on Site</u>
240	April 1910	
241	August 1909	
242	N/A	
243*		1930
244	August 1909	
245	April 1910	
246	May 1910	
247	April 1910	
248	June 1913	
249*		1938
253		April 1941
---*		N/A

*Denotes a garage building serving adjacent quarters.
Reference the site plan for these buildings.

Architect: N/A

Historical Narrative:

Fort Snelling is a National Historic Landmark. The original Fort Snelling was built by the United States Army in 1820. The fort is sited on a high bluff overlooking the confluence of the Mississippi and the Minnesota Rivers. For almost thirty years Fort Snelling was the hub of the Upper Mississippi River - the center of government policy and administration and a haven for travelers and others who sought protection and society within its limestone walls. This was also a strategic point for the military to establish its presence among the native American Indians in the territory.

The history of Fort Snelling is well documented in the archives of the Minnesota Historical Society. In that history one finds that the Army continued to expand Fort Snelling from its original site. During World War I and World War II, the Army reached a peak of activity at Fort Snelling. Following World War II, the U.S. Army drastically curtailed operations and turned over most of the real property to the Veterans Administration.

During the period just prior to World War I, circa 1909, U.S. Army Quartermaster records on file at the Minnesota Historical Society reflect the erection of two of the quarters buildings. Others followed in 1910, 1913, 1930, 1938 and 1941.

The Quarters buildings were originally sited on the Fort Snelling military reservation to serve as quarters for civilian employees working on the military reservation. The civilian employees were involved in the support of the U.S. Army installation. In 1909 transportation to the Fort Snelling military reservation from the cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul was not as convenient as today. Civilian employees would have had a more difficult task commuting daily to work at the reservation. In order to alleviate that aspect of employment, the U.S. Army made these quarters available to certain civilian employees.

There is a later reference in the U.S. Army records noting these buildings as Non-Commissioned Officers (N.C.O.) Quarters. This would indicate that the buildings were subsequently used to house military personnel.

The growth of the Ft. Snelling military reservation continued through World War II. Following that episode, the U.S. Army began to withdraw from the reservation and transferred most of the real property to the Veterans Administration. The Veterans Administration Medical Center, with an organizational structure containing an Engineering Service geared to building maintenance, repair and utility operations, was charged with the responsibility of administering the building and grounds.

The Veterans Administration Medical Center has used the buildings as rental property to house Civil Service employees. The buildings have been occupied by and maintained by the Veterans Administration Medical Center since 1946 to the present.

In 1982, the Veterans Administration decided to begin abandoning real property located on the Ft. Snelling reservation area. A new replacement hospital was planned which would facilitate consolidation of the medical center's operations.

The quarters buildings were no longer rented as employees vacated. Maintenance and repair of the quarters was curtailed as the Veterans Administration proposed a plan to demolish the buildings. This plan was submitted to the Minnesota Historical Society for review.

In concert with the Minnesota State Historical Society, the quarters buildings (Bldgs. 240-249, 253) were first proposed for inclusion in the National Registry of Historic Places. The Keeper of the National Registry of the National Park Service ruled the building(s) eligible for inclusion on October 16, 1986.

The Veterans Administration then entered into a Memorandum of Agreement with the Minnesota Historical Society to demolish the quarters buildings. After review of several alternatives for the continued use or demolition of the quarters, demolition appeared as the most prudent and feasible alternative.

Historically, the quarters buildings have served the U.S. Army as housing for civilian and/or military personnel during the period from 1909 to 1946. The Veterans Administration subsequently made use of the quarters(s) from 1946 to the present time housing civil service employees working at the agency's medical center.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character. The quarters buildings are wood frame buildings with wood exterior and asphalt shingle roofs. The buildings were set on masonry foundations. There are no unique features in the architectural design or exterior renditions of these quarters.

2. Condition of Fabric. The buildings are in need of repair and maintenance. This has been curtailed because the cost of maintenance has not been considered feasible due to the plan to demolish the buildings.

B. Description of the Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions of the buildings are as shown on V.A. Station Drawing 722-A.

2. The buildings are set on masonry foundations except for the three garage buildings which are poured concrete slab foundations.

3. Walls are wood framed with exterior wood sheathing and plaster interior.

4. Structural joists and rafters are of wood.

5. Porches are enclosed with wood walls having frames for glass windows.

6. Chimneys serve the heating system; these are constructed of brick with metal flue liners.

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways are wood framed openings; doors are wood with window-lites.
- b. Windows are of wood frame construction with single pane glass. There are storm windows made of wood frames with single pane glass. A few of the storm windows have aluminum frames.

8. Roof:

- a. Roofs are standard pitched with a single peak over the living areas of the quarters. Front porch roofs are generally of the hip-roof construction while the rear entry roof is of single slope construction. The roof construction can best be observed in the photographic documents.
- b. All roofs overhang the covered structure below providing an eave around the top of the quarters.
- c. There are no roof dormers, cupolas, towers or other structural details of any significance.

C. Description of Interior(s):

1. Generally the quarters buildings are either one or two story wood frame dwellings. All of the quarters were single family residences except for Building 248 which served as a two-family duplex. The interiors were similar, each providing an entry porch, living room, dining area, kitchen, bathroom, and one, two or three bedrooms. Each was provided a basement housing heating equipment and storage space.

Interior walls were generally plaster; some painted, others covered with wall paper, masonite or plywood. Wood trim around windows and doors was quite plain. There is no ornamental woodwork or significant design in the interiors of these residences.

2. Stairways: The stairways in the quarters are of wood construction. Those leading to upper floors have plain square balusters with a simple handrail and newel post. The stairwell woodwork has all been painted; some stair treads were carpeted. Stairs to basements are plain open wood tread with no risers between the carriages; some are unpainted. A single wood handrail is affixed to the wall or stairs.

3. Flooring: Flooring in all of the quarters is wood. In some areas the wood flooring has been covered with linoleum or carpeting. The porch flooring is generally painted.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls are plastered in most of the living areas of the quarters. Some walls have been covered with wallpaper, some with masonite and some with plywood. Ceilings are generally plaster; some have been covered with tile. Many walls and ceilings are cracked and peeling.

5. Openings: Doorways are plain wood framed openings. Doors are wood panel with one or more windowlites. The doors no longer fit the openings to seal tightly and some doors are missing.

6. Hardware: Hardware on doors and windows is generally well worn. There is nothing of note in the design or quality of cabinet hardware, knobs, hinges or locks. The quality might best be described as inexpensive.

7. Mechanical equipment:

a. The quarters are heated by steam radiators supplied from a gas-fired low-pressure boiler in the basement. The boiler construction indicates that steam was originally generated in coal-fired boilers that were converted to gas burners. The exterior stairwells would have provided a means of bringing coal into the basements. Hot water is generated in gas-fired heaters with 30-gallon storage tanks located in the basement.

b. Lighting in these quarters is provided by incandescent light fixtures ceiling mounted. In a few rooms, the incandescent has been replaced with a fluorescent fixture. Lighting is switched at wall plates; some lighting is switched by a pull cord.

c. The early plumbing included galvanized iron pipe to distribute hot and cold water as well as to provide drains. Some of the iron pipe has been replaced or modified by the addition of copper piping.

There are cast iron bathtubs in the bathrooms which are supported by legs on the floor. Original toilets and lavatories have been replaced over the years. The toilets are of the conventional tank-type design. Lavatories have dual faucets and pop-up drains.

Steam piping to the radiators is black iron, covered by asbestos insulation. In several of the buildings, the pipe insulation has been removed and the steam pipe in the basement is bare.

D. Site: General setting and orientation: The quarters are sited to face Minnehaha Avenue which runs in a north-south direction. Buildings 240-247 face east; Buildings 248-253 face west. The quarters are located on property that is adjacent to the Fort Snelling Historical District. The location can be noted on Station Drawing No. 1028 dated August 19, 1986.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. The Veterans Administration proposes to demolish these quarters buildings in 1987. This historical documentation was prepared by the Veterans Administration in the spring of 1987. It is one portion of the historical/architectural recordation of these quarters which have previously been documented for inclusion in the National Register of Historical Places. This documentation includes a photographic dossier and V.A. Engineering drawings

relating to the site and the quarters. The recordation is prepared to meet the standards of the Historic American Buildings Survey, U.S. Department of the Interior.

B. This documentation was developed in concert with the Minnesota Historical Society who provided U.S. Army Quartermaster records for review. Early photographs and records are available at the Minnesota Historical Society, Fort Snelling, Minnesota.

Prepared by: Charles Kiefer
Engineering Service
Veterans Administration Medical Center
Minneapolis, MN 55417
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